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RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1297  
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 0177  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000201

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [ID](#)  
SUBJECT: SBY FIRES BACK AT HIS OPPONENTS

REF: A. 06 JAKARTA 13577 (WIRANTO LAUNCHES NEW PARTY)

- [1](#)B. 06 JAKARTA 13233 (SBY AND THE REFORM UNIT)
- [1](#)C. 05 JAKARTA 12822 (RETIRED GENERALS TAKE)
- [1](#)D. 05 JAKARTA 12416 (INDONESIAN OPPOSITION GROUP)

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Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER ERIC W. KNEEDLER, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. On January 15, Indonesian agitator par excellence Hariman Siregar organized a rally of approximately 1000 people to simultaneously protest the SBY administration and commemorate the 33rd anniversary of the Malari incident (Note: The term refers to a historic student protest that Hariman Siregar organized in 1974 which was ultimately crushed by Suharto. End Note). The actual size of the commemorative protest fell far short of Hariman's pre-rally prediction and unfolded peacefully and without incident. Despite the rally's modest size, the President and his spokesperson denounced the protest and its organizers, an act that Hariman claimed demonstrated the President's unhealthy focus on criticism. Earlier in the week SBY also sent Coordinating Minister Widodo and Intelligence Chief Syamsir Siregar to meet with a small group of retired generals who had publicly assailed the SBY administration. An embassy contact suggested this initiative was undertaken to combat rumors about the group's alleged plans to topple the government. Despite the fact that the President enjoys favorability ratings above 60% and no serious competition for 2009 thus far, many criticized SBY's decision to respond to the muted protest and the generals and cited it as evidence of his continued sensitivity to opposition activities.

BLINK AND YOU MIGHT MISS THE PROTEST  
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[1](#)2. (U) The media coverage leading up to Hariman Siregar's January 15th protest was extensive and many commentators anticipated that the "People's Parade to Revoke the SBY-Jusuf Kalla Mandate" would be a large and stinging rebuke of the President. Hariman, one of the country's most adept self promoters and a perennial plotter (Refs C and D), wasted little time capitalizing on the coverage and boasted about a very large turnout for his demonstration. On the day of the event, a full three hours before the official start of the demonstration, several dozen police trucks and a large contingent of well equipped Indonesian police forces took up their positions in and around the planned finishing point at

Hotel Indonesia, as well as at the rally's assembly point near the Embassy; clearly the police expected something big.

13. (U) In the end, only about 1000 people turned up for the rally, a modest number in a country where demonstrations are a regular sight and obscure movements or parties routinely assemble 10,000 or more attendees seemingly overnight. Some of the demonstrators carried signs commemorating the anniversary of the Malari incident and others walked with banners criticizing the SBY administration. The participants marched peacefully along the planned protest route and the entire demonstration unfolded without incident in less than three hours.

14. (U) On January 16th, the day after the protest, press coverage of the event was scarce. Limited media commentary focused primarily on Hariman's dramatic failure and the President's wide support. Nevertheless, Presidential Spokesperson Andi Mallarangeng criticized Hariman Siregar and the protestors for advocating the removal of the President through undemocratic means, and in doing so, appeared to give Hariman a second wind. Hariman quickly took advantage and used his return to the headlines to blast the President for, among other things, his failure to follow through on the UKP3R Reform Unit (Ref B), his indecisiveness, and his economic record. On January 21, President Yudhoyono answered the bell himself and blasted Hariman and his supporters in a speech to members of the Star Reform Party (PBR). SBY argued that he had lowered the poverty rate, cut unemployment and yet would never be able to satisfy his critics.

HARIMAN SIREGAR - I PROTEST...THEREFORE I AM  
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15. (C) When we asked Hariman about his public feud with the President and his return to the limelight, he did not attempt to suppress a wide grin that spoke volumes about how much he

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enjoyed the publicity. He claimed, somewhat implausibly, that he was simply interested in highlighting "the people's" unhappiness with the President. When we noted that SBY consistently enjoyed approval ratings of 60% and higher, Hariman dismissed the importance of the polls and argued that SBY "worried more about the polls than his job." He told us that the President's apparent capitulation on the UKP3R was the last straw and convinced him that he needed to take to the streets to register the country's growing discord with SBY's performance. Hariman was less articulate when we asked about his ultimate objective, or even his next step, offering only that he was not a politician and did not "have an agenda."

16. (C) Hariman told us that SBY's decision to criticize Hariman personally convinced him that the President simply was not capable of enduring any form of criticism, "no matter how insignificant." Hariman pointed out that his protest had been very small and claimed that if the President had simply ignored it, he would have been happy to fade away and let the matter drop entirely. Instead, he argued that the President's decision to acknowledge the protest and attack it only succeeded in giving Hariman a legitimacy that he would have lacked otherwise. Even more disturbingly, according to Hariman, was the fact that SBY had asked Intelligence Chief Syamsir Siregar to call him prior to the demonstration and "encourage" him to keep the numbers small, an act that he claimed reflected a dangerous paranoia and a willingness to resort to "Old Order ways."

17. (C) According to Hariman's friends in Vice President Kalla's office, Hariman said Kalla laughed out loud when he reflected upon SBY's response to the protest and his "paranoia" about other opposition activities. Hariman also claimed that SBY had allegedly approached several of his cabinet members and complained that they had not defended him in public.

18. (U) On January 16th President Yudhoyono sent Coordinating Minister Widodo and Intelligence Chief Syamsir Siregar to meet with a small group of disgruntled retired generals that had generated headlines with their anti-SBY attacks and been coming together occasionally since SBY assumed office (Ref C). The meeting included former Vice President and outspoken SBY critic Try Sutrisno, former Army Chief Tyasno Sudarto, former Army Chief Wismoyo Arismunandar, and a handful of other Old Order era military figures. Retired General Wiranto (Ref A) and former Army Chief Ryamizard Ryacudu notably did not attend the meeting.

19. (U) Following the meeting, several of the military figures told the media they were not interested in any extra-constitutional removal of the President. Syamsir Siregar also reported to the press after the meeting that the generals had clarified that their so called "Revolutionary Council" had a misleading name and was not at all "revolutionary in nature."

10. (C) According to presidential aide Yenny Wahid, the proposal to engage the generals came from Coordinating Minister Widodo. Yenny told us that SBY agreed to dispatch Widodo and Syamsir Siregar to meet with them and viewed the meeting as an opportunity to allow the generals to air their grievances and "hopefully move on." More importantly, according to Yenny, was the need to combat rumors that the generals were engaged in a nefarious plot to bring down the government. Yenny doubted that the President harbored any serious concerns about the probability of such a plot, but she told us SBY was concerned that in a country where rumors gain currency with astonishing speed, it was important for the administration to meet with the group and publicly dispel any rumors about a conspiratorial nexus between the generals and other opposition groups, including Hariman Siregar's ragtag following.  
PASCOE